What Counts: Rethinking education policy and practice for social justice

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This paper provides a critique of the ‘context-indifferent’ aspects of contemporary education policy settings, internationally, nationally and at the state and territory levels in Australia. The critique focuses on the policy usages and framings of both international comparative measures of school performance on PISA and the uses of NAPLAN data. Analyses of both sets of data tend to be ‘context-indifferent’, focusing on the contribution of ‘in-school factors’ (particularly teachers’ pedagogies) to the detriment of consideration of the effects of ‘out of school factors’, including the degree of inequality and poverty in the society and societal failures to acknowledge difference. In sustaining its argument of the need to ‘complexity’ policy settings in education if we want a high quality and socially just schooling system, the lecture provides case studies of the usage of PISA data and NAPLAN data for policy purposes. It will argue that teacher-centric policy is a two-edged sword: rightly recognizing the centrality of teachers and their pedagogies and valuing their contributions, but also denying the complexity of contextual factors that, together with in-school-factors and funding and policy settings, contribute to achieving or prohibiting the best student learning outcomes. The paper argues the necessity of considering and addressing both in-school and out-of-school factors, including taking account of social inequality, as the way towards achieving high quality, socially just schooling systems. The paper will sustain an argument about what counts for achieving socially just schooling systems. In arguing the case, I will draw on my research on pedagogies that make a difference and on my recent policy research on the impact and usage of PISA and NAPLAN for policy and in schools.

Professor Bob Lingard is a Professorial Research Fellow in the School of Education and the Institute for Social Science Research at The University of Queensland and a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia. Bob has an international research reputation in the sociology of education. His most recent books include: Politics, Policies and Pedagogies in Education (Routledge, 2013), Globalizing Education Policy (Routledge, 2010), co-authored with Fazal Rizvi, Changing Schools (Routledge, 2012), co-edited with Pat Thomson and Terry Wrigley and Educating Boys: beyond structural reform (Palgrave, 2009), co-authored with Wayne Martino and Martin Mills. As well as 17 books, Bob has published more than 100 refereed journal articles and book chapters and was co-director of research that developed the influential concept of ‘productive pedagogies’. He currently holds three Australian Research Council grants.
Education equity and the intensification of human capital

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This paper will examine the inclusion of ‘future-oriented’ dispositions in the conception and measurement of human capital and the implications for equity agendas in education. Governments in advanced capitalist nations are increasingly concerned to invest in forms of human capital required by knowledge and service industries, particularly affective dispositions that support face-to-face service and creative jobs that cannot be easily moved offshore like production jobs. This is leading to an ‘intensification’ of human capital as everyday affective geographies become quantified as sources of economic value and as governments intensify their promises to citizens that more learning will equal more earning. This has also enabled politicians, policy makers, academics and activists to rationalise in economic terms the importance of equity policies and programs that aim to improve social welfare through increased educational participation and improved outcomes; for example; the strategy of raising aspiration for higher education. Drawing on interviews with policy personnel working for the OECD and analyses of OECD and Australian education policy documents, this paper will examine developments in human capital and education equity policies to consider how ‘future-oriented’ dispositions have become a convergent site of intervention to strengthen national economies through human capital investment and to increase equity and social inclusion by widening participation in education. This convergence requires careful theorising and empirical research to consider how affective dispositions such as optimism, which are often considered to be individual-psychological resources for well-being and social mobility or social-collective resources for political action, are now also being captured as a source of human capital value.

Dr Sam Sellar is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Education at The University of Queensland. He was previously a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Sam is currently working on three ARC projects investigating national and global education policy, new accountabilities in schooling and the aspirations of young people in high-poverty regions. Sam is co-convenor of the Higher and Professional Education special interest group in the Australian Association for Research in Education and is an associate editor of the journal Critical Studies in Education. He has recently published articles in the Journal of Education Policy, British Education Research Journal, Comparative Education and Educational Philosophy and Theory. He also has a forthcoming book (with Bob Lingard, Goli Rezai-Rashti and Wayne Martino) titled Globalizing educational accountabilities: Testing regimes and rescaling governance (Routledge).
Teacher Education for High Poverty Schools

Jo Lampert, Faculty of Education, School of Cultural and Professional Learning

Bruce Burnett, Faculty of Education, School of Cultural and Professional Learning

A vital element to improve outcomes for disadvantaged students is outstanding teachers. A reality, however, is that teacher graduates in the top quartile of academic scores are far less likely to accept positions in tough urban, regional, rural and remote schools. Further, because high poverty schools can be challenging environments, these teachers are retained for much shorter periods of time.

In response to this challenge, Associate Professor Jo Lampert and Associate Professor Bruce Burnett designed QUT’s Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools program (ETDS). It creates a pathway for the highest quality pre-service teachers to be fully prepared, professionally and personally, for rules within low SES schools. The program identifies the highest-achieving pre-service teachers in QUT’s Bachelor of Education program, and offers them a specialised curriculum and supported practicum experience in a network of disadvantaged partner schools. By working closely with Education Queensland and partner schools, the program also works to channel these exceptional pre-service teachers into employment in schools where they will have the greatest impact. Its initial results have been exceptional: 87% of graduates are now employed as teachers in low SES schools. The Origin Foundation has now committed $2 million over 3.5 years to support the planned scaling of ETDS program to six additional universities.

Associate Professor Jo Lampert is co-director of the National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools (NETDS) Program at Queensland University of Technology. Jo has a long history of teaching, publication and research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and equity. Along with Bruce Burnett, Jo co-led the Australian Council of Deans of Education/More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative research project in 2012 and is currently co-leading research on a national DEEWR funded research project targeting strategies employed by schools to address Indigenous disadvantage (Focus School Next Steps Initiative Case Studies). Lampert & Burnett’s co-edited book ‘Teacher Education for High Poverty Schools’ will be published by Springer Press in 2015.

Associate Professor Bruce Burnett has a background originally in primary education and is currently teaching and researching in the area of sociology of education with a particular interest in ‘Work Integrated Learning’ and targeted teacher education placements in the low SES schooling sector. Bruce has co-authored three books and his significant achievements include a competitive Japanese Ministry of Education, Visiting Foreign Professorship of Education and UNESCO commissions to research and write case studies of Blended Learning in Australia. In addition to designing and implementing the National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools (NETDS) Program, Bruce and Jo Lampert are currently Lead Researchers with on a national DEEWR funded research project targeting strategies employed by schools to address Indigenous disadvantage (Focus School Next Steps Initiative Case Studies).
A necessary thought experiment: Changing the secondary school template

Marie Brennan, Victoria University

Secondary schools in Australia continue to follow their colonial template, copied from the elite private schools of Mother England, embodying norms of institutional knowledge work, relationships and organisational forms that build injustice into the fabric of education. While senior secondary remains in thrall to university entrance, and school leaving age has gone up, bogus credential inflation and standardised content and assessment regimes have been allowed to run riot, privileging economic purposes in ways that centralise sorting and selecting functions of schooling. This paper argues that unless the secondary school can be reimagined away from its current factory model template and the associated ‘grammar’ of schooling (Tyack and Tobin 1994), we will be reduced to tinkering around the edges or putting up weak ‘alternatives’ that are evanescent or re-incorporated into the template, affecting all expectations of schooling from early years and primary to universities and teacher education. Starting from this analysis, the paper proceeds to identify existing options which might develop into challenges that centre other purposes for schooling. These include building in student research on the ‘big ideas’ of our time, community action and community archiving projects, following up in-depth personal interests outside the school, reducing school size, along the lines of Big Picture, building in global networks among students (‘globalisation from below’). All these approaches require different settlements –settlements that require dialogic analysis and consent from parents as well as students to go beyond the credentialing system underpinning schooling as usual. In developing this approach to future-schooling education for justice, the paper relies on rebuilding teacher researchers and their networks, as well as new forms of teacher education that can articulate the sober reassessment of the contestations required and the commitment to justice that keeps contestation alive.

Professor Marie Brennan has worked in universities since 1991. Prior to that, she worked in the Victorian Department of Education as a Humanities Teacher in technical schools, with stints in the Access Skills Project Team of Curriculum and Research Branch and the School Improvement Plan.
Supporting young peoples’ aspiration for futures in a time of cruel optimism

Dr Lew Zipin, Victoria University

In current contexts, secondary school-age young people, particularly from power-marginalised regions, face difficult conditions for optimistic pursuit of viable futures. As traditional job and career possibilities in industrial and trade sectors diminish, many experience downward mobility in relation to their parents – reversing the trend of cross-generational upward mobility in the decades from WW2 to the 1991 recession. Policy and populist discourses tout ‘service’ and ‘knowledge’ economies as replacement sectors for gainful employment, on the condition that young people complete school and access further education in order to acquire ‘human capital’ that fits them for work in these sectors. That significant portions of targeted young people nonetheless do not complete school or continue into further education could be attributed to the failure of secondary school curriculum and pedagogy to engage their interests and imaginations, as well as to many young people finding that continued education does not enhance their life prospects as promised. Yet government policy – in defining secondary completion and tertiary access as both human capital and equity issues – simplistically constructs the problem as lack of ‘aspiration’ on the part of school leavers, and the solution as ‘raising their aspirations’.

This paper begins with a critique of the individualist – psychological assumptions inhering in policy discourses about ‘raising aspirations’. Included is a critique of the construction of ‘equity’ as a matter of gaining individual motivation to aspire, while making light of the limiting effects of poverty and other inequalities suffered by structurally marginalised population groups. The paper then argues that educational research and practice to support young peoples’ hopes for futures need more sociologically complex and substantive conceptions of ‘aspirations’: as practices, strategies and inter-subjective formations among young people as they struggle for viable futures in times of ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant 2011). This requires comprehending the lived complexities that policy discourse simplifies, in which young people forge aspirations from multiple mediums: ideological messages in populist media; family and community cultural traditions; and emergent lived-cultural processes in which young people make new sense of social worlds from their generational standpoints. The paper further considers methodological challenges for (1) researching the subtleties of aspirations newly emerging among young people; and (2) educationally capacitating young people to articulate and pursue viable aspirations. The ethical responsibilities of educational researchers and school practitioners, hopefully working together, are also considered, drawing on a research project funded by the Australian Research Council, titled Capacitating Student Aspirations in Classrooms and Communities of a High-Poverty Region.
“Bending but not breaking”: Aspirations of university students of refugee backgrounds

A/Prof Loshini Naidoo & Liv Hamilton, UWS

In this presentation, we capture the negotiated and dynamic nature of refugee students’ agency regarding post school aspirations. Drawing on data from interviews with current university students of refugee background, it is evident that these students are immensely resilient, moulding their own life chances to be agents of their own futures. Despite the interrupted schooling and difficulties experienced especially in language acquisition, students of refugee backgrounds use their social and cultural resources to aim towards their career aspirations within the constraints they experience.

Global citizens and educational leaders: Pathways for refugee-background students

Prof. Margaret Vickers, Dr Katina Zammit, Ms Florence Lee, UWS

By the end of 2011, growing out of global disruptions caused by prolonged armed conflict, natural disasters, and economic turbulence, there were 43.3 million forcibly displaced people in the world. Although many seek resettlement in countries such as Australia, only a very small proportion of them succeed in arriving and gaining resident status. A large proportion of these new arrivals are children and young people who may have limited, interrupted, or no formal education. Whether they enter the education system at the primary, secondary or higher education level, they face enormous challenges. Much of the literature describing provision of educational opportunities for refugee-background students takes the form of victimology, cataloguing the seemingly intractable problems these students face. This chapter takes a different position. Local and global examples of effective pedagogical practices at both secondary and higher education levels are used to show how refugee-background students can act as educational leaders. Effective functioning within an Australian classroom demands that students possess tacit forms of inside knowledge, about what assignments mean, what is rewarded, and how academic work is supposed to be done. Once introduced to this tacit knowledge, refugee-background students are well placed to create bridges that allow other new arrivals to transition from an outsider status to insider expertise. Functioning as global citizens who have experienced racism and conflict on a scale not matched by many local students, with appropriate support from teachers, these students can introduce new ways of knowing to classrooms at all levels.
A tale of two engaged classrooms: ‘It was the best of times…’

A/Professor Geoff Munns, UWS

This paper reports on action research undertaken in two low SES classrooms in Sydney’s South West. The research is part of the Fair Go Bridges project that is implementing the Fair Go Program’s student engagement framework using a co-researching and mentoring model. The paper discusses the pedagogical changes implemented, the reasons they were put into place, the impact on the engagement of individual learners and the processes around building classrooms as ‘insider’ learning communities.

Turning students on to learning: Two teachers making a difference

Dr Katina Zammit, UWS

Classrooms can be sites where students see education as a potential – a resource to be profitably employed within their lives. Alternatively, they can be places that convince students that school is not for them. Unfortunately, many students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds become disillusioned with learning because the messages conveyed through the discourse in classrooms around curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices reinforce disengaging messages instead of engaging ones.

In this paper, I focus on the classrooms of two teachers from the Exemplary Teachers of Students in Poverty: A Fair Go Project: Sonia’s year 2/3/4 class in a small rural ‘town’ in northwest NSW, and Georgia’s year 4 class in a suburb in SW Sydney. It will consider the way that the discourses of power played out in the classrooms, via the messages students received about their knowledge, ability, control, voice and place. It will also make connections between the teachers’ curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices, and Bernstein’s concept of pedagogic discourse. In particular, it will consider how the practices they chose shifted not only what was taught (the instructional discourse) but the regulatory discourse which creates order, relations and identity, hence reinforcing the engaging messages students received.
Closing the equity gap: Policy supporting teachers as they elicit creative student music-making

A/Professor Anne Power, UWS

Drawn from research in schools in low socio-economic areas, this paper investigates how teachers elicit creative student music-making and the policy supporting them in their work. The research project, Teachers for a Fair Go, in NSW Department of Education and Communities Priority Schools investigated pedagogical practices of exemplary teachers located in low socio-economic areas. This paper is about the ways in which teachers guide students to explore creative processes (expressing different points of view about deforestation; musically depicting the emotions of the First Fleeters and the Indigenous population; and imagining Egyptian funeral rites) and, in so doing, commence the closing of the equity gap.

Two strategies for building powerful and connected communities within and out of the classroom in low SES schools

Dr Joanne Orlando and Dr Leonie Arthur, UWS

The paper draws on research undertaken as part of the UWS Fair Go project with 29 teachers working with students from preschool to Year 12 in low socio-economic communities in New South Wales. The research investigated classroom pedagogies that engage disadvantaged students and so help them to achieve equitable educational outcomes. This paper presents two key findings from the research which focus on the practices teachers used to build community within and out of the classroom. One finding focuses on engaging practices with technology that support disadvantaged students and the second on culturally responsive pedagogies. Effective teachers develop learners’ cognitive knowledge of curriculum content and processes and provide intellectually challenging and meaningful learning experiences, while also building powerful and connected learning communities where students have agency and feel a sense of belonging.

Teachers-as-Researchers in low SES contexts

Ms Eve Mayes and Professor Wayne Sawyer

The Fair Go program of research in low SES schools has always proceeded on the not unproblematic model of teacher as researcher (Fair Go Project Team, 2006; Munns et al, 2013). This presentation will focus on the value of a ‘researchly disposition’ (Lingard & Renshaw, 2010) for teachers and how this disposition was manifested in the most recent Fair Go projects. ‘Researchly’ work will be considered from the researching viewpoints of an academic and a teacher. The particular place of a teacher-as-researcher model in low SES contexts will be considered as the key equity issue in the presentation.
Language Mapping: Researching marginalized students’ everyday language and literacy practices

Dr Jacqueline D’Warte and Professor Margaret Somerville, UWS

In the last three decades, considerable scholarship has focused on the ways children are socialized into particular understandings and usages of language and literacies from their homes and communities and the impact of these ways on students schooling (Heath, 1983, Luke, 2005, Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Somerville, 2012). This work has helped us to consider issues of power, equity and justice in relation to particular forms of language and literacies that do not align with the mainstream language and literacy practices valued in school (Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martínez, 2009; Lee, 2007; Purcell-Gates, 2013). Schools are increasingly constrained by societal and institutional mandates that promote singular language and literacy and fail to recognize the complexity of language/s and literacies across all domains of students’ lives. Student diversity of communicative competence is often erased or reduced, especially under the current pressures of high stakes testing. The lives of culturally and linguistically diverse students are most often adversely affected with students frequently encountering negative assumptions about their abilities to perform linguistically and academically (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Conchas, 2006). What has been repeatedly demonstrated is that measures of ‘success’ in school and often in everyday life depend on which forms of language and literacies one commands.

In this presentation we analyse students visual and textual mapping of their everyday language/s and literacy practices as a method for exploring the capacities of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We propose that these maps are not only creatively engaging but position students as active participants whose contributions and knowledge can be used as resources for building new shared knowledges with other students and their teachers. We suggest this language mapping offers these students an opportunity to consider how language and literacy shifts across and around practices, communities, and countries. These maps can be used to help teachers and the students themselves to recognize the complexity of their everyday language practices and skills. Their ability to express how they use multiple languages and cross registers and codes with flexibility, deploying them strategically for different relationships, contexts, and purposes is a rich resource for alternative pedagogies of language and literacy to benefit all students and support the enhancement of the English language curriculum.
Embodying Inequality: Space, ethnicity and habits of learning

Dr Megan Watkins, UWS

This paper examines how the utilisation of spaces within the home by children of differing cultural and socio-economic backgrounds impacts upon their disposition to learning. It explores how children can develop a certain familiarity, or what Seamon (2002) refers to as an “at homeness”, through the spaces they inhabit and the practices in which they engage which facilitates educational performance. Individuals become comfortable within particular milieus and the positive affective relationships that develop encourage a certain naturalness about activities performed there. The paper draws on a study of children of Chinese, Pacific Island and Anglo-Australian backgrounds whose home environments produce quite different educational experiences some more and some less conducive to the formation of what I call the scholarly habitus. The organisation of space and its relation to specific practices, I argue, is crucial to the acquisition of forms of self-discipline necessary for sustained scholarly labour.

These micropractices of power embedded within the spaces of children’s lives underlie the very inequalities of education yet, as a function of space and the discipline it engenders, are largely ignored, overshadowed by macro analyses of class and ethnicity which fail to capture the subtleties of how inequality is embodied and reproduced within the pedagogies of the everyday.

“Controversial Issue(s)”: The framing of sexual diversity for educators in NSW Schools

Dr Jacqueline Ullman and Dr Tania Ferfolja

National research illustrates the high degree of discrimination that prevails against LGBTQ students, resulting in diminished educational outcomes, both academic and social. This phenomenon is influenced by the prevalence of whole-school silences around LGBTQ topics in many Australian schools, evidenced through national data on topic coverage and teachers’ reluctance to address this content. This paper presents an analysis of NSW policy, curriculum and syllabus documents to examine how contradictory framing and messages; silences and omission; and various discursive constructions of the LGBTQ subject together produce silencing technologies that render these issues difficult to broach in schools and potentially hazardous for teachers to address.
“It was the most soul destroying thing I ever did in my entire life...” – Dirty little secrets and trajectories into the profession of early career English teachers

A/Professor Susanne Gannon, UWS

Deficit understandings of young people, particular schools and whole school sectors continue to shape public perception and the profession, and to impact on teacher education. This paper draws on interviews with high achieving English teacher graduates who abandon or avoid public schools, or who have abandoned the English curriculum area for which they have been trained. Through narrative vignettes that condense the socio-material and affective dimensions of their accounts of beginning teaching, it traces binaries such as schools ‘like that’ versus schools ‘like this’, between perceptions of this is ‘just who I am ’ as a person versus how I must be as a teacher, of teaching ‘content’ versus teaching kids, and the gap between university rhetoric on equity and social justice in teacher education and the dirty little secret that our students continue to graduate with disdain for certain students and schools.

Girls Can and Boys Can’t? The factors shaping choice and the new compulsory schooling age in single sex, ethnically diverse south-western Sydney high schools

A/Professor Carol Reid

Drawing on interviews and focus group discussions with parents, teachers and students from an ARC Discovery project focused on the new compulsory schooling age in NSW, this paper examines the intersection of ‘choice' with the social relations of gender and ethnicity. The approach taken to analysis does not foreground ethnicity or gender as simply 'read off the bodies' of young people but examines how they are actively constituted in social relations. While the participants discussed in this paper are located in contexts of similar socio-economic status, and at times the same families, a more complex analysis is needed to understand the factors shaping schooling in single sex schools in south-western Sydney, a touchstone area for issues related to educational equity. SES and teaching practice have dominated the educational equity discursive space with micro cultural factors being the main foci. The research discussed in this paper reinforces the importance of 'looking away' or examining the things going on behind your back (Mills, 1959), for not only is there a policy disjuncture associated with choice and the new compulsory schooling age, but there are also gendered discourses shaping school cultures and parent responses to the schooling market. The intersection of processes of ethnicisation with these gendered discourses emerges as a significant factor in the dynamics and dimensions of equity in the single sex schools in this study.